

**Southwest Resource Advisory Council
MEETING MINUTES
Friday, May 29, 2009
Anasazi Heritage Center
Dolores, Colorado 81323**

ATTENDEES

Resource Advisory Council Members

Nik Kendzierski, Category 2	Wally White, Category 2
Al Heaton, Category 1	Gerald Koppenhafer, Category 3
William Ela, Category 3	Alan Staehle, Category 3
Andrew Gulliford, Category 2	Dan Morse, Category 2
Andrea Robinsong, Category 2	Tony Gurzick, Category 3
Kathy Welt, Category 1	Jim Cochran, Category 3
Ken Emory, Category 1	Jim Young, Category 1
Jevin Croteau, Category 1	

BLM/FS Staff

LouAnn Jacobson, BLM, Manager, Anasazi Heritage Center & Canyons of the Ancients National Monument	Matt Janowiak, BLM, Manager, Columbine Field Office
Steve Beverlin, USFS, District Ranger/ Field Manager, Dolores Field Office	Kevin Khung, USFS, Manager, Pagosa Springs Field Office
Mark Stiles, USFS, Center Mgr/Forest Supervisor, San Juan Public Lands Center	Barb Sharrow, BLM, Manager, Uncompahgre Field Office
Bill Dunkelberger, BLM, Associate Center Manager, San Juan Public Land Center	Erin Curtis, BLM, Public Affairs Officer

Visitors

	Representing	City/Town
John Whitney	Congressman Salazar	Durango
Mike Smith	Questar	
Leonard Maez	Questar	
Rebecca Root	Ute Mountain Ute Tribe	

Opening Remarks from Designated Federal Officer (DFO) and RAC Chair

The meeting was called to order at 9:07 a.m. by Kathy Welt, Chair, Southwest Resource Advisory Council (SWRAC). There was a roundtable of introductions. After a few late arrivals, the RAC had full attendance.

Updates from Barb Sharrow, DFO

- Colorado BLM State Director Sally Wisely will be retiring effective July 1, 2009.
- Lori Armstrong has been selected as the District Manager for the Southwest Colorado District. She presently works for the BLM Shoshone Field Office in Idaho. She plans to arrive in Montrose and start work on August 3rd.

- The RAC nominations for the five expiring terms have been submitted to the BLM State Office. Hopefully we'll hear back from the Secretary's office on selections for the RAC vacancies by August or September.
- The new Gunnison Field Office Manager, Brian St. George, starts June 22nd.
- Erin Curtis, the new Public Affairs Officer for the UFO, GFO and GJFO has arrived and is present here today. Erin's duties include assistance to the SWRAC.
- There is still no new BLM director. Mike Poole, former CO Associate Director, will continue as acting BLM Director for the time being.

Field Office Managers' Reports

Anasazi Heritage Center & Canyons of the Ancients National Monument, LouAnn Jacobson, Manager:

Established in 2000, the Heritage Center is also the visitor center for Canyons of the Ancients National Monument. There are a limited number of developed sites within the National Monument. The museum has approximately 3.6 million objects in collection. They are making an effort to reuse collection objects for research requests. There has been a major update to exhibits in the main gallery in the last couple of years. This summer they will be working with Colorado Preservation Inc., hosting the Colorado Youth Summit for 85 students, plus instructors. The group will educate the students about public lands management for the USFS, BLM and NPS. At the end, the participants will make their recommendations for future land management.

Pagosa Springs Field Office, Kevin Khung, Manager:

The field office is working on deferred maintenance on trails with a big crew hired for the season. They are also looking at a potential biomass project in Pagosa Springs, and working towards completion of a 400-acre reforestation project. In this project, they will remove non-native, non-thriving, ponderosa pine which had been planted 40-70 years ago after the area was logged.

Columbine Field Office, Matt Janowiak, Acting Manager:

The local communities are very engaged in the RMP planning process. There are six to nine coal-bed methane wells coming up. They are working on a land exchange/acquisition in the Silverton area, adjacent to the town site. All campgrounds are open for the season. A new Fire Management Officer (FMO) is on board. Oil and gas leasing has been deferred until completion of the plan in areas immediately adjacent to Durango. They hope to have the plan completed by the end of 2010. Work continues on the recreation plan with the Gunnison Field Office for the Alpine Loop area. They are working towards a land acquisition with Standard Metals (not superfund sites). Some of the exchanges may help with road re-routing.

Dolores Field Office, Steve Beverlin, Manager

They are working on a travel management plan covering 1.2 million acres, with site specific EAs in four areas. Colorado Off-Highway Vehicle Coalition's (COHVCO) trail sustainability summit will be in Cortez June 18th. They are working on forest health and sudden aspen decline issues, as well as BLM livestock grazing permits renewals. Forest Service grazing permit renewals are to be completed by December 2010. They are experiencing new growth in oil and gas development in the Gothic shale formations not previously considered economically feasible.

The question was asked: What are they doing about air quality issues for new oil and gas development? They are conducting new re-modeling on all gases, except ozone. Presently, there are only a few wells operating. There are predictions that up to 1700 wells are possible. Once the first 210 permits are issued, then there will be enough data to predict future impacts. They'll start ozone monitoring soon, looking at rural ozone levels. The study includes ozone effects on high elevation plants. DOW will continue to work through the planning process to address the impacts on deer populations.

Regarding energy, the uranium appeal was upheld. There is one potential wind energy project and lots of uranium speculation. A local mill has temporarily shut down, primarily due to lack of market for finished product. They can't bid on sales because they can't sell the product, so they can't utilize the sick aspens.

Gunnison Field Office, Barb Sharrow for Keith Berger

Regarding the Draft Gunnison travel management plan, the plan is out and they are holding community meetings. The comment period on the travel plan ends June 3rd. There has been a lot of active comments and discussion, mostly on Forest Service issues. They hope to have the final plan out by next January. The comment period on the Alpine Loop Plan has closed and they are processing comments. They are also working on grazing permit renewals.

Uncompahgre Field Office (UFO), Barb Sharrow, Manager

Dominguez-Escalante National Conservation Area (D-E NCA) was formally designated. The date of the dedication is unknown, and they are waiting on coordinating a date with Secretary Salazar's Salazar and Congressman Salazar's schedules. Invitations will be sent as soon as a date is determined. A site for the dedication has been picked, NCA signs have been ordered. The D-E NCA will have its own RAC to advise BLM through the planning process (3-4 years). Expect a call for RAC nominations in the near future. The RAC will be 10 persons, with representatives needed from Mesa, Delta, and Montrose Counties, and grazing permittees within the D-E. Members can be on both the SWRAC and the D-E RACs. Katie Stevens will be the interim D-E NCA manager. They hope to hire a permanent manager within the next year. The Grand Junction Riverfront Commission will be floating the lower Gunnison June 5th. The Gunnison Gorge NCA and Black Canyon National Park 10 year anniversary celebration will be October 10, 2009 at Black Canyon National Park. They are finishing up grazing permit renewals. The Dry Creek Travel Plan is presently in the protest period. The appeals process is next and they hope to have the final completed by September. The land exchange proposed by Western Land Group, may be done as a "legislative" exchange, therefore no NEPA is required. The proposed west end uranium mill is on private land, not BLM, so there will be no BLM action required.

Follow-up from RAC Field Trip to McPhee Reservoir, May 28, 2009

Mike Preston, Dolores River Dialogue:

McPhee Reservoir was built mainly for irrigation projects, but flows from the reservoir are also managed for fish. Raftable flows can be achieved when the reservoir is full. Peak water flows were May 11th – 28th, but it usually peaks the third week in May. The "fill and spill" technique gets and keeps the reservoir full before releases happen.

The Dolores River Dialogue group started meeting in 2004. A lot of management focused on “spill management”. They are now addressing environmental issues, recreational issues, etc. to determine how flow management can work for all uses. Funding comes from various sources. The Lower Dolores had been deemed suitable for a Wild and Scenic river designation. The Dialogue is looking at alternatives to the Wild and Scenic designation.

The question was asked: Why all the work to find alternatives to Wild and Scenic? A “Wild and Scenic” designation can be made only by Congress and implies a Federal Reserved Water Right (FRWR). The Dolores water rights are already fully allocated, so a FRWR could conflict with existing water rights. There are lots of conditional water rights, or change of use water rights. A FRWR would include the amount of water necessary to preserve the “outstanding and remarkable values” for which the Wild and Scenic designation was made. The next Dolores River Dialogue meeting will be some time in July.

Federal Stimulus Package Reports

The State of Colorado BLM received \$18 million in stimulus funding awards. The BLM will have until the end of FY2010 to spend the money. The projects fall into seven categories: remediation of abandoned mines, capital improvement, roads and bridges maintenance and construction, trails maintenance and construction, deferred maintenance, renewable energy, and habitat restoration.

San Juan Public Lands Center (SJPLC) (18% of CO BLM budget)

- One abandoned mine remediation project
- Deferred maintenance
 - Accessibility improvements at Anasazi Heritage Center
 - Intern house at Heritage Center – replace inefficient furnace
- Capital Improvement, Anasazi Heritage Center roof replacement with photo-voltaic system
- Habitat Restoration
 - Canyons of the Ancients habitat improvement
 - Canyons of the Ancients invasive weeds treatment
 - Dolores habitat restoration – landscape level restoration for the Gunnison Sage Grouse and Desert Big Horn
 - Abeyta Mesa reforestation
 - Tamarisk control – Canyons of the Ancients and Dolores River
 - Dolores Field office native seed increase
 - Dolores River invasive species control and restoration
- On the Forest Service side: A SW Conservation Corp/Veterans Green Jobs/USFS partnership will be doing fuel reduction.
- Received some of the project money due to high unemployment in local counties.
- Most projects will be contracted out.
- SJPLC will be hiring a lot of temporary help, including a Youth Corp of about 40 kids for 20 weeks.

Gunnison Field Office (7 projects)

- Improvements to seven recreation sites.

- Skunk Creek habitat restoration
- Alpine Gulch bridge repair
- Cebolla Creek bridge replacement
- Sign, map rehab Hartman rocks
- Two abandoned mine projects

Uncompahgre Field Office: 16 projects (18% of CO BLM budget)

Capital Improvement-

- Gunnison Gorge National Conservation Area Safety & Critical Resource Protection
- Montrose FO PV System

Deferred Maintenance-

- Gunnison Gorge NCA Chukar Road improvements of primary access to NCA and WSA
- Gunnison Recreation Site Improvements at seven sites
- Montrose Building Energy Conservation. Stabilize cracking masonry buildings and insulate/sheath
- Montrose Complex Exterior Maintenance. Add security fencing/gates, repair parking and sidewalks.
- Dominguez Escalante Visitor and Management Improvements
- Gunnison Gorge NCA River Restoration, treat noxious weeds and plant cottonwood trees

Habitat Restoration-

- HR Escalante Watershed Restoration
- HR Gunnison Gorge Sage Grouse Habitat Restoration
- HR Gunnison Sage Grouse Habitat Improvement
- HR Peach Valley Tamarisk Removal & Riparian Restoration
- HR Uncompahgre Partnership Habitat Restoration Project
- HRB Uncompahgre Ponderosa
- Remediation of Abandoned Mines-
- Club Mesa mine closure project
- Long Park mine closure project
- Montrose County Uranium mine closure project
- Trails maintenance and construction-
- GGNCA Travel Implementation sign, map, rehab of linear disturbances, obliterate illegal routes

Update on Canyons of the Ancients Proposed Plan final EIS

LouAnn Jacobson, Manager:

LouAnn had planned to provide a full briefing on the specifics of the Canyons of the Ancients Management Plan, but after they are still waiting for permission to print the plan for distribution. She thanked Andy Gulliford for writing up some user-friendly background information for the plan. Once the plan is printed, there will be a 30-day protest period concurrent with a 60-day Governor's consistency review. While they are waiting to print, they are working on the administrative record that goes along with it. The plan went out for public comment in October 2007 and closed in January 2008. They had meetings with the RAC sub-group, state agencies

and non-profit groups. They received 574 unique comments and approximately 14,210 form letters from the Wilderness Society. Many of the comments received were on grazing, fluid minerals, recreation, transportation, and cultural resources management.

Election of Officers:

Ken Emory nominated Kathy Welt to continue as chair. Jim Young seconded the motion. Motion passed unanimously.
Andrew Gulliford will remain as co-chair.

Review of Resolutions Initiated at Statewide RAC Meeting in February 2009

Air Quality (Kathy Welt): No progress has been made on this resolution since the Statewide RAC meeting. Kathy will re-initiate contact with other RAC groups. Andy requested that something be added to the resolution addressing human health concerns.

Socio-Economic issues (Dan Morse): Dan hasn't communicated with other RACs on this statewide resolution.

Uncompahgre Field Office Resource Management Plan (UFO RMP)

The UFO had planned to start the scoping process for the plan in June, but have had delays getting the contractor assigned to the plan. They now hope to start the scoping in August. In the meantime, they have talked with many potential cooperating agencies in the area and 14-15 have expressed interest in wanting to be cooperators on the plan. These cooperators need to be Governmental agencies. Other pre-plan work in progress includes: a contract to inventory paleontological resources in the field office area, and a visual resource inventory is to be done in July. The Wild and Scenic River inventory is complete (scoping meeting will see draft eligibility for Wild and Scenic designations), they have started the Reasonable and Foreseeable Development (RFD) scenario development for potential oil and gas operations for the next 25 years, as well as trying to learn as much about air quality monitoring as possible.

Barb asked for some thoughts from the RAC on how they would like to engage in the Plan process. After discussion, a motion by Andrea to form a sub-group as primarily a listening group was withdrawn. A new motion was made by Tony Gurzick and seconded by Andy Gulliford to: **“Create a sub-group to help with the UFO RMP revision. The group would consist of at least three members of the Southwest RAC (ideally one from each category), plus an undetermined number of members of the public, to be active participants in the planning process, not just a listening group.”** The motion passed unanimously.

The potential SWRAC members to start the group: Ken Emory (Cat. 1), Andrea Robinson (Cat. 2) and Bill Ela (Cat. 3).

Healthy Lands Initiative (HLI)

UFO: Working on weeds projects throughout the field office area, including a tamarisk removal project in Gunnison Gorge.

SJPLC:

Kathy Nickle was able to secure a grant for \$425,000.

Gunnison sage grouse could become a “keystone project” and,” this would help secure more money for large, long-term projects.

Tamarisk bugs are working well, but eat themselves out of a job (the tamarisks), then die.

BLM is not prepared for what other non-native plant growth might come in after the tamarisks. Some areas may get re-growth of tamarisks before the bugs can rebuild their population. If the bugs do the biggest work on taking out the tamarisks, then we can do more intensive work after the bugs. Partners with SJPLC on HLI projects: Sam Walton foundation, Packard Foundation working to wipe tamarisk out of CO river basin

Gunnison: HLI information available as handout.

Public Comment Period:

John Whitney for Congressman Salazar: The proposed San Juan Mountains Wilderness Act proposes new wilderness areas. John will send out more information on this to RAC members. Sec. Ken Salazar and Rep. John Salazar do want to attend the Dominguez-Escalante NCA dedication and are trying to get their schedules worked out.

Mike Smith and Leonard Maez of Questar sat through the RAC meeting. When asked by the RAC how things were going from their perspective, they said that the operations end is going well. They are still working on lingering permits, but feel they are basically moving forward. They have met with State Director Sally Wisely and withdrew some permits and worked on some alternatives.

Agenda Items for Next Meeting:

Keystone Projects – map of where projects might be.

Alpine Loop tour on Aug 27

UFO RMP update

Status of Eureka land exchange

Silverton land issues - staff speaker

Stimulus update

Potential Special designation for Alpine Loop

Change meeting location to Lake City?

Meeting adjourned at 3:05 p.m.